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Speakman, Thomas  
Henry

Political parties

[Philadelphia]

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Speakerman, Thomas Henry

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# POLITICAL PARTIES: THEIR USES AND ABUSES,

## Evils of Drawing Party Lines in Local Affairs,

AND

WHO RESPONSIBLE FOR PARTY CORRUPTIONS.

**HONOR OF PHILADELPHIA TO BE MAINTAINED IN THE  
CENTENNIAL, ETC., ETC.**

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At no time in the political history of Philadelphia, so much as the present, have circumstances existed appealing so earnestly for the action and interference of every citizen in whose heart there is any response to the calls of patriotism and public duty.

Philadelphia is the birthplace of American independence, whose centennial anniversary we are soon to celebrate, inviting to our city on that grand and momentous occasion the people of the civilized world. But we have thus far had chiefly in mind, as our part in the great Philadelphia Exposition of 1876, the exhibition of the progress of the American people in material industry and wealth, while the event we propose to celebrate is essentially a political one, and its more direct political aspects the most appropriate to be made the subject of review and comparison. In contemplating our present political condition as a people compared with that of 1776, we cannot but recur to the pure and exalted patriotism, the incorruptible integrity, and self-sacrificing devotion, of the men who were then accustomed to tread the streets of our city—Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Hancock, Adams—all, indeed, who then accepted public position high or low at the hands of the people. It would seem from the class and character of men who fill public offices now, as though a new race of beings had come to inhabit our city. Shall we, in-

deed, compare the men who occupied Independence Hall in 1776 with those who now occupy the chambers above—the Continental Congress of 1776 with the Councils of the city of Philadelphia in 1873! And how stand we to-day in heightened rectitude, patriotism, and political morality, if we compare generally the men of '76 with the representative politicians of our city of the present day, for example, the Sheriff, Register of Wills, District Attorney, Representatives in the Legislature, Aldermen, &c. Foreigners coming here have a right to judge of us by the character of men the people elect to fill their public offices; and they have a right to judge of the working of our boasted republican institutions by what we ourselves are compelled to say of the existing state of things, and by what they themselves cannot but see when they come among us.

Are the merchants, professional, and business men, and honest and patriotic men of Philadelphia, willing that in the course of our Centennial Exposition, with our city thronged with the most intelligent men from all parts of the earth, they shall be represented by the servants and adherents of the *Ting*, as our country has been represented and scandalized at the opening of the Vienna Exposition?

When we consider that our community abounds with men of high honor and integrity, that indeed a large majority are of that class in their private relations, it is difficult to conceive how a class so opposite in character should be able to secure, and maintain so completely the control of all our city affairs, and pervert by fraud, and with impunity, even the machinery of our elections for the purpose of keeping themselves in power. The explanation is found in the single word *party*.

Political parties seem to be a natural and legitimate outgrowth of republican institutions, and like most other things they have their abuses as well as their uses. As a means of combination for the purpose of carrying through important measures of national or it may be state policy, they have their unquestionable advantages. No better illustration of this is needed than the triumphant carrying through of the

stupendous war against the Southern Rebellion by the Republican party. But obvious as are the advantages of party organization in cases of this kind, their evils are not less apparent in the government of a single municipality like the city of Philadelphia. It is sometimes said that parties are of service to watch one another, but in such cases it is only as one bird or beast of prey watches another, for a chance for plunder. Occasionally it has occurred in local affairs that the party in power becoming intolerably corrupt, a comparatively few independent men, casting their votes with the party in the minority, have turned the scale, deeming any change for the better, but with only temporary relief. Political morality is not advanced by this process. Neither party is interested to introduce wholesome and permanent reforms, but prefers to await its chance for power and plunder. Neither is willing to destroy the goose that lays the golden egg.

It must be conceded that the drawing of party lines in local affairs, is an unmitigated evil. It enables a few corrupt party men to pervert and use the party name and influence for the accomplishment of purposes entirely foreign to the principles which the party exists to uphold, subordinating the public good to their own aggrandizement, and rendering the whole community a prey to the rapacity of a horde of unscrupulous party dependents, who insinuate themselves into every department of municipal government, and find impunity in their extortions and their crimes in the security which party combination affords. It neutralizes whatever of individual patriotism and political honesty may exist in the community, and keeps the standard of political morality down to the degrading level of the few mercenary politicians, who, by means of the party lash, manage to usurp the powers of government, and divert them from their legitimate ends.

But the mischiefs of party rule are not only those which affect the people in their aggregate capacity: habitual submission to party dictation dwarfs the mind, obliterates the individuality of the man, and makes him a mere party tool. Familiarity with the corruptions sanctioned by the prevalent code of political morals, blunts the finer sensibilities, destroys

self-respect, and the high sense of honor and rectitude which constitute true manhood.

A reference to some of the measures resorted to by our local politicians will serve to show how it is that they are able to maintain their ascendancy in a community whose moral sense would otherwise cast them off in disgust.

Preceding the election of October 1872, there appeared in the public papers the following letter:

PHILADELPHIA, September 23d, 1872.

CHARLES A. PORTER, Esq.

DEAR SIR: The undersigned citizens of the Sixth Legislative District desire to express to you their approbation of your course as their Representative in the Legislature of Pennsylvania, and to assure you of their intention to endorse your renomination at the coming election.

Respectfully yours,

J. GILLINGHAM FELL.

WASHINGTON BUTCHER.

JOHN H. CHAMBERS.

WM. PEPPER, M.D.

GEORGE D. BUDD.

R. H. GRATZ.

H. K. STILLE, M.D.

LOUIS WALN SMITH.

CLAYTON McMICHAEL.

E. C. KNIGHT.

W. D. FRISWORTH.

THEODORE FROTHINGTON.

CHARLES GILPIN.

H. EARNEST GOODMAN.

WILLIAM McMICHAEL.

R. P. GILLINGHAM.

EDWARD BROWNING.

R. E. ROGERS, M.D.

CHARLES E. SMITH.

CADWALADER BIDDLE.

WEIR MITCHELL, M.D.

RUDOLPH ELLIS.

BENJAMIN H. BREWSTER.

HENRY C. CAREY.

WM. H. PANCOAST, M.D.

STEPHEN A. CALDWELL.

RICHARD S. BROCK.

LINDLEY SMITH.

W. H. BUCKNELL.

Knowing little, I do not propose to say much of Charles A. Porter personally. He had been translated from the position of *Deputy Sheriff* to that of Representative for the Sixth District in the Legislature of our State, and thus, jointly with others, clothed with the sovereign power of making laws liable in the highest degree to affect for weal or for woe the interests and the happiness of our people, and being a candidate for re-election in opposition to a gentleman of unquestionable standing and ability, nominated in the interest of reform, it

was deemed essential, it seems, that he be supported by the names attached to the foregoing letter. He is of the class of politicians, who, as representatives in the Legislature from this city, have been a terror and a disgrace, and deliverance from whose corruptions has been the chief moving cause of the necessity for an amended constitution, and yet these gentlemen, as in charity we must suppose, from *party* considerations lent their names to his support.

In June of last year there appeared in the papers a letter addressed by a number of gentlemen to F. Theodore Walton, in which, to use their own words, they "*beg* leave to request that you will *consent* to go before the members of the Republican party of this city as a candidate for nomination for Recorder of Deeds." They go on to say, that his nomination, and election to this office, would be a "fitting recognition of his services as an earnest, enthusiastic, and faithful worker in the cause of Republicanism." The names to this paper are as follows:

ALEXANDER HENRY.

J. GILLINGHAM FELL.

MORTON McMICHAEL.

JOHN GIBSON'S SONS & CO.

WATSON & JANNEY.

J. FRAILEY SMITH.

F. CARROLL BREWSTER.

MATTHEW BAIRD.

JOHN P. VERREE.

JOHN PRICE WETHERILL.

J. P. BRUNER & SONS.

AMOS R. LITTLE.

JAMES L. CLAGHORN.

M. HALL STANTON.

It is well known that Mr. Walton was so far moved by this flattering tribute and appeal as to *consent* to *accept* the nomination, and was elected; and, as compared with his predecessors, it is due to him to say, that his management of the office has been highly satisfactory. At the time, however, when these gentlemen thus gave their names to the public in support of Mr. Walton, there was already in nomination for the same position a gentleman of unquestionable loyalty to Republican principles, pre-eminently qualified by education and experience, and of high standing as a citizen, who agreed to perform the duties of the office at a salary of \$8000 a year, while it was well known that Mr. Walton would de-

mand the usual fees, yielding to the Recorder, as variously estimated, from \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year. Of course it is understood, that notwithstanding the suppliant language of this appeal, it was a device of Mr. Walton himself or of his political confederates, in his behalf, to procure the indorsement of the gentlemen whose names are attached, and this they were willing to lend, being in effect a public recommendation to the people, over their signatures, to support Mr. Walton for Recorder of Deeds in preference to all other candidates. None of these gentlemen in their private business would think of paying \$50,000 a year for services which a man of, to say the least, equal standing and qualifications offered in good faith to perform for \$8000 a year. But what is of vastly more significance, the gentleman offering to perform the duties of Recorder of Deeds for a salary of \$8000 a year, was one of a number of candidates proposed for the different city offices, by a number of gentlemen who have been conscientiously laboring to better the governmental condition of our city, and proposed the system of salaries in lieu of fees as one of the most important measures to that end. These special indorsers of Mr. Walton, therefore, not only recommend the people to do what they would not do themselves, that is, to pay \$50,000 a year for services that were offered to be performed for \$8000 a year, but set themselves up as the sustainers of existing errors and corruptions in our municipal government; and all this for *party*.

The names of a number of these same gentlemen are also found annexed to a paper issued immediately preceding the election of October, 1871, cautioning the people against voting the Reform Ticket; to another, recommending William B. Mann for District Attorney; and to another, the previous year, indorsing William R. Leeds for Sheriff, and so forth. Of these by themselves, under the circumstances, I should for my part have little complaint to make, but they may properly be taken into view in connection with the more recent manifestoes, the apparent animus of which serves to give character to the whole.

This review of the co-operation of party elements will en-

able us to understand how local party strength is maintained regardless of merit, and to determine who are chiefly responsible for party abuses. The general character of our local politicians, those who do the party work, fill the various offices, and get the plunder, is such that they could not of themselves withstand the mere moral power of an intelligent community; but they know well how to use another class of men, that represented by the names attached to the foregoing papers, to obtain the necessary respectability. To remove the abuses in our local government that are upheld by this system of party co-operation, it is easy to see, therefore, where the assault must be made. The real supporters of the system are those who lend character and respectability to it; and it is their best excuse that they have probably little thought of the extent of their complicity, and of the mistake it is to carry party distinctions into mere municipal affairs.

In thus criticizing the conduct of these gentlemen in this particular, I do it with full knowledge of the fact cheerfully admitted that they are in other respects among our best and most useful citizens, and some of them who are personal acquaintances and friends I esteem most highly, and am sure they will appreciate the motives which prompt, and therefore excuse this reference to their names as made public by themselves.

No line can be drawn as the limit of the responsibility of these gentlemen for party corruptions. Not content to be quiet voters, they publicly assume the fatherhood of the party, and consequently the doings of its operators and wirepullers, and must take the responsibility. The whole aggregate system of error and wrong by which the public offices are allowed to become and exist as nurseries of corruption, through the exorbitant sums realized from them by extortion and otherwise, they are the bulwarks and supporters of, and the open antagonists of all those who seek to better this state of things. If the machinery of elections be perverted by the selection of officers and arrangement of plans for the illegal multiplication of votes and false returns, they are properly to be considered accessories to the crime. If Charles

A. Porter or F. Theodore Walton should deem it necessary for greater security of their election, or from a playful desire to win a bet as to the party majority, either directly or by connivance to employ repeaters, or otherwise illegally to multiply votes, their public backers are responsible; and as to the citizens whose dearest rights are thus invaded the guilt of each of the three successive parties to the crime rests equally upon all. And I charge that more or less of the names found to the papers indorsing Messrs. Porter and Walton are among those whose talismanic power rescued from the penitentiary Brown, the convicted repeater; and if by this, injustice is done to any of them, they may be more successful than others in procuring and making public the true names, which the President and Attorney-General have thus far deemed it proper to withhold, in defiance even of a resolution of request from the people's representatives in Congress, and thus vindicate themselves.

Cannot these gentlemen and all other reasonable citizens be persuaded of the unmitigated folly of the longer continuance of a policy—the adhering to party lines in mere local offices—which is at the same time the cause, and the sole obstacle to the removal of the existing disgraceful state of things in Philadelphia? What possible difference can it make whether the person filling a mere municipal office, as Recorder of Deeds, for example, be of one party or the other? Whether as to such offices sometimes one and sometimes another party be in the ascendant, as is now the case in the course of years, or whether by mutual consent party lines be ignored in a common effort to promote the greatest good of the people by selecting the best and most capable men, and introducing all reforms that can be from time to time suggested? Important principles or measures advocated by any party stand the best chance of permanent success when presented upon their own merits before an intelligent community, instead of being liable always to be imperilled by party degeneracy. Till the great principles and measures upon which the Republican party was founded become crystallized into unchangeable law, they are in infinitely more danger from the corruptions

engendered by carrying party distinctions into mere local concerns than from any other cause.

The perversion of national parties from their legitimate purpose of maintaining national issues to that of rewarding their favorites at the expense of the people of particular localities, the avowed purpose of Messrs. Baird, Henry, Fell, and others in giving Mr. Walton the office of Recorder of Deeds, at \$50,000 a year, when in the interests of the people the duties were offered to be performed for \$8000 a year, has uniformly entailed, in the end, degeneracy, disgrace, and defeat. Let all true Republicans come to the rescue ere it is too late.

The National Republican party is one thing, and the so-called Republican party of Philadelphia quite another thing; the one will be remembered in history, to be honored till the millenium shall come and put an end to all questions about human rights; but what shall we say of the other!!

Cannot a new era be introduced in our local politics, in which we shall have government of the people by the people and for the people, instead of longer permitting our local government to be monopolized by a class of men who seek thereby to revel in wealth at the expense of the people whom they profess to serve?

The terms of some of the officers to be chosen at the coming election will extend over our centennial year. Will the people of Philadelphia permit the national disgrace of allowing themselves to be represented by such a class of men, and this contest for right with all the self-abasement it discloses, to be renewed on that grand occasion, when our city, like the focus of a lens, will be the centre of observation to all the civilized world? These men have laid their plans for a sure victory in October. By their refusal to permit any amendment of the Registry Law last winter, they avowed at the same time their fear of the result of a fair election, and their determination to perpetrate so much fraud as might be necessary to make the result sure; and their recent nominating election gave renewed evidence of a proficiency in *counting* that defies everything in the way of actual legal votes.

There is one thing, and but one, that can completely set at naught these well-laid plans of traitorous iniquity; and that is, *the aroused indignation of an outraged community*. It remains to be seen how far the spirit of our forefathers of 1776 is to be found among us at the end of a century. How many there are willing to prove themselves worthy of the blessings of free government, and to do their duty as citizens in preserving our institutions for posterity as they have been handed down to us.

I regard it as entirely practicable to arrest the calamity which so imminently threatens, of the extension of *Ring* rule into our centennial year; but it can only be accomplished by a spontaneous movement of the people, fired by a just indignation against existing wrongs, and animated by a pure and lofty patriotism; and individual citizens being willing to make some sacrifice for the public good.

A ticket is in the field in the interest of reform, which commends itself to every good citizen; but no mere personal considerations or attachment to any party or organization should now or hereafter be allowed to stand for a moment in the way of such a concentration of the better elements of society as will insure our deliverance.

I have no desire for notoriety, and shrink from the seeming presumptuousness of supposing that my humble name could add anything to whatever force there may be in the views before presented, but having dealt freely with the names of others, deem it improper to withhold my own.

THOMAS H. SPEAKMAN.

PHILADELPHIA, September, 1873.

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